1: Dube E-5 (1951-52) 1955 AW17 Telugu AW17

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

According to the caste composition of the villages and existing social bonds between them, people belonging to one particular caste will have their own *panchayat* for a group of villages. Thus in the case of some castes ten to twenty villages have their own caste *panchayat*, while in the case of others thirty to forty villages together have a common council of this type. In some cases endogamous sub-castes have their own *panchayats*; but in many others the wider caste group comprising many sub-castes has a composite council of its own. Caste headmen representing each constituent village are the members of this council—although in actual practice other wealthy and influential, as well as vocal and assertive, persons also gradually come to occupy a seat in it. Serious breaches of the norms and traditions of the caste, as well as important intra-caste disputes, are heard and decided by these caste *panchayats*. Cases of divorce, failure in fulfilling agreements made before finalizing marriage arrangements, serious sexual lapses, and of breaches of the social norms of the caste, such as incest, breaches of the rules of endogamy and exogamy, eating forbidden food and pursuing a 'lower' occupation, etc., would be under the jurisdiction of such a caste *panchayat*. But it must be pointed out that there is no clear-cut distinction between the powers and functions of the caste *panchayat* and the village *panchayat*. For example, when a serious case of incest comes to their notice both these *panchayats* take action independently. Similarly, if a person belonging to one of the Hindu castes kills a cow or is found to have eaten beef, simultaneous action is likely to be taken by both the *panchayats*. In general, however, it can be laid down that matters of a primarily local interest are brought to the village *panchayat*, while those having a bearing on specific caste customs fall under the jurisdiction of the caste *panchayat*. A large number of marginal disputes may be heard by either, and often the local tradition defines their respective jurisdictions. As the *panchayat* in Shamirpet is sufficiently aggressive it has arrogated to itself a considerably wide range of powers.

While all villages and nearly all castes have their own *panchayats*, inter-village *panchayats* are formed from time to time when they are demanded by a special situation. They function as *ad hoc* arbitration committees. Conflicts between two villages, or between two parties belonging to different villages (and not drawn from one particular caste), often necessitate an inter-village